MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION

PROJECT: CASTLE CRAGS STATE PARK ROOT CREEK DRAINAGE FOREST FUELS MANAGEMENT AND PUBLIC SAFETY IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

LEAD AGENCY: CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS

Under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and State CEQA Guidelines, the lead agency is the public agency with primary responsibility over approval of a project. California State Parks (CSP) is the CEQA lead agency because it is responsible for implementation and operation of the Castle Crags State Park Root Creek Drainage Forest Fuels Management and Public Safety Improvement Project (project).

PROJECT DESCRIPTION SUMMARY

CSP proposes to implement the project within the 435-acre Root Creek Drainage in Castle Crags State Park (CCSP). CCSP is located at the north end of the Sacramento Valley off Interstate 5 in Shasta County. Root Creek Drainage, the project area, encompasses the northern slope of Kettlebelly Ridge, Vista Point Road parking and viewing location, a portion of the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT), and land next to and just west of I-5, which is all entirely contained within Shasta County. Refer to Figures 2-1 through 2-3 in the attached initial study (IS) for the regional location of CCSP as well as the specific project area.

The project objectives are to improve forest health, reduce wildfire risk, effectively sequester carbon, reduce noxious weed infestations, and provide a secondary emergency access/evacuation road exiting Vista Point. The project consists of three main activities:

- **Implementation of the Forest Management Plan and Fuels Reduction:** Forest fuels in the Root Creek Drainage would be strategically reduced via hand and mechanical thinning, followed by biomass disposition and prescribed burns, per guidance in the Forest Management Plan. The application of understory thinning followed by prescribed burning would be the most common technique for forest management within Root Creek Drainage. The majority of the forest fuels reduction activities would occur from October through March.

- **Ongoing Vegetation Management.** Ongoing vegetation management would occur, including targeted herbicide use to control noxious weeds including, but not limited to: French broom (*Genista monspessulana*), sweet pea (*Lathyrus latifolius*), bull thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*), wooly mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*) and Himalayan blackberry (*Rubus armeniacus*). Herbicides including Milestone, Milestone VM plus, Garlon-4 Ultra, Element-4 and RoundUp Pro Concentrate would be applied via foliar spray at concentrations specified on the chemical's label during fall and/or spring season depending upon species. Infested areas could be treated up to three times a year.

- **Reestablish Secondary Emergency Access Road to Vista Point.** A secondary emergency access road between the park entrance and Vista Point would be reestablished along an existing, abandoned road bed to: (1) provide a secondary emergency access road for visitors at Vista Point, (2) provide secondary access to the watershed and Vista Point for fire crews in case of wildfire, (3) provide access for equipment and crews to perform forest fuels reduction activities, and (4) replace an existing failed culvert in Root Creek and restore the current creek crossing so that culvert capacity would be adequate, diversion of high flows outside the creek channel would cease, and water quality would be improved.

Project activities are anticipated to begin in late 2019. Reestablishment of the secondary emergency access road would occur over several months, while forest fuels reduction activities and vegetation management would begin in late 2019 and continue on an ongoing basis to maintain healthy and safe forest conditions.

STANDARD PROJECT REQUIREMENTS

CSP employs standard project requirements (SPRs), which are State Park System-wide environmental protection measures and features applied to a project's design, construction process, or operation that are implemented with the objective of avoiding significant environmental impacts; these measures are not required to reduce a significant impact under CEQA. These measures were developed from the Park's Health and Safety Plans, BMPs, and known regulatory requirements. The SPRs that would be incorporated into the project include the following:

- Construction personnel will store all project-related materials outside of the viewshed of Vista Point.
- Within 300 feet of the PCT corridor, removal of trees (14 dbh and smaller) will occur via hand crews, to the extent feasible, to reduce visual impacts to the PCT. If large mechanical equipment is required, all efforts will be made to keep the equipment off of and outside the viewshed of the PCT.
- No equipment or vehicles will be parked or staged within the PCT corridor.
- Leave tree markings will consist of flagging and will be removed once work is complete. Paint will only be used to mark take trees.
- No rare or endangered species will be cut, pruned, pulled back, removed or damaged in any way.
- Prior to the start of on-site construction activities and when the plants are in a phenological stage conducive to positive identification (i.e., usually during the blooming period for the species), a California State Parks approved biologist will conduct surveys for special-status plant species throughout the project area.
- If special-status plants are discovered within 50 feet of the project area, the area within 10 feet of special-status plants will be flagged by a California State Parks approved biologist, fenced off prior to the start of fuel treatments and construction activities, and completely avoided when feasible.
- Best management practices (BMPs) to avoid creation of dust will be employed during all mechanical fuel treatments, and construction activities within 50 feet of special-status plants.
- To prevent the spread of noxious weeds, all construction vehicles and equipment will enter and leave the project site free of soil, vegetative matter or other debris that could contain weed seeds.
- All herbicides will be handled, applied, and disposed of in accordance with the material safety data sheet and all local, state, and federal laws.
- Prior to the start of project activities, a CSP-approved biologist will train on-site personnel on the life history of foothill yellow-legged frog and pacific tailed frog, provide work constraints, and any other pertinent information related to the species.
- Prior to the start of project activities, a CSP-approved biologist will conduct surveys for foothill yellow-legged frog and pacific tailed frog within suitable habitat in the project area and up to 50 feet outside the project boundaries.

- Immediately prior to the start of work each morning within suitable habitat, a CSP-approved biologist will conduct a visual inspection of the construction zone for foothill yellow-legged frog and pacific tailed frog.

- If any foothill yellow-legged frog or pacific tailed frog is found within the project area, work in the vicinity of the animal will be delayed until the species moves out of the site on its own accord or is temporarily relocated by a CDFW-permitted/CSP-approved biologist.

- CSP will schedule all work after August 15 or before March 15 to avoid the nesting period for northern goshawk.

- If work is required during the nesting season (March 15 to August 15), a CSP-approved biologist will conduct a survey to identify northern goshawk nests using the methods found in Survey Methodology for Northern Goshawks in the Pacific Southwest Region (USFS 2000).

- If northern goshawk nests are located within 500 feet of the project area, no construction will occur within 500 feet of the nest during the nesting season or until the young have fledged, as determined by a CSP-approved biologist.

- CSP will schedule all work after August 15 or before March 15 to avoid the nesting period for common raptors and other nesting birds.

- If work is required during the nesting season (March 15 to August 15), a CSP-approved biologist will conduct a survey to identify nests of common non-raptor nesting birds within 50 feet or common raptor nests within 500 feet of the project area. The survey will be conducted no more than 14 calendar days prior to the beginning of construction.

- If common non-raptor bird nests are located within 50 feet of the project area, no construction will occur within 50 feet of the nest during the nesting season or until the young have fledged, as determined by a CSP-approved biologist. If common raptor nests are located within 500 feet of the project area, no construction will occur within 500 feet of the nest during the nesting season or until the young have fledged, as determined by a CSP-approved biologist.

- If work is required during the denning season (January 31 to July 1), a CSP-approved biologist will conduct a survey using the techniques in Zielinski and Kucera (1995) or similar, and the recommended survey effort in Slauson et al. (2009) to identify the presence of fisher within the project area. The survey will be conducted annually prior to the beginning of activities for that year.

- If any fisher are located within the project area, due to the cryptic nature of maternity dens it will be assumed that a maternity den may exist within the project area, and no construction will occur during the denning season (January 31 to July 1), as determined by a CSP-approved biologist. If no fishers are found to occur, then work may proceed according to schedule without constraint from this species.

- CSP will employ BMPs for erosion control to avoid runoff of project-related sediments, vehicle fluids, and other liquids into special-status plant communities.

- If riparian habitat is located within 50 feet of construction activities, the edge of the riparian habitat will be flagged by a CSP-approved biologist prior to the start of construction activities and avoided to the extent practicable.

- Prior to the start of on-site construction work, a Cultural Resource Specialist will flag and/or fence all cultural resources with a buffer of 50 feet for avoidance during on-site project activities. The Cultural Resource Specialist will remove the fencing after project completion.

- If anyone discovers previously undocumented historical or archaeological resources during project construction, work within 50 feet of the find will be temporarily halted until the Cultural Resources

Specialist designs and implements appropriate treatments in accordance with the Secretary of the Interiors Standards and Guidelines for historical or archaeological resource protection.

- In the event that human remains are discovered, work will cease immediately in the area of the find and the project manager/site supervisor will notify the appropriate CSP personnel. Any human remains and/or funerary objects will be left in place or returned to the point of discovery and covered with soil. The CSP Sector Superintendent (or authorized representative) will notify the County Coroner, in accordance with §7050.5 of the California Health and Safety Code. The local County Coroner will make the determination of whether the human bone is of Native American origin.

- If the Coroner determines the remains are Native American, the Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC) will be consulted to identify the Most Likely Descendants (MLD). After identifying the MLD, the NAHC will contact the appropriate Native American tribe about the find. Work will not resume in the area of the find until proper disposition is complete (PRC §5097.98), in consultation with the MLD.

- If it is determined the find indicates a sacred or religious site, the site will be avoided to the maximum extent practicable. Formal consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office and review by the Native American Heritage Commission/Tribal Cultural representatives will occur as necessary to define additional site mitigation or future restrictions.

- Prior to the start of on-site construction activities, construction personnel will inspect all equipment for leaks and regularly inspect thereafter until equipment is removed from the project site. All contaminated water, sludge, spill residue, or other hazardous compounds will be contained and disposed of outside the boundaries of the site, at a lawfully permitted or authorized destination.

- Prior to the start of construction involving ground-disturbing activities, construction personnel will prepare and submit a Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) for CSP approval that identifies temporary BMPs (e.g., tarping of any stockpiled materials or soil; use of silt fences, straw bale barriers, fiber rolls, etc.) and permanent (e.g., structural containment, preserving or planting of vegetation) for use in all construction areas to reduce or eliminate the discharge of soil, surface water runoff, and pollutants during all excavation, grading, trenching, repaving, or other ground-disturbing activities. The SWPPP will include BMPs for hazardous waste and contaminated soils management and a Spill Prevention and Control Plan, as appropriate.

- Prior to the start of on-site construction activities, construction personnel will prepare a Spill Prevention and Response Plan (SPRP) as part of the SWPPP for CSP approval to provide protection to on-site workers, the public, and the environment from accidental leaks or spills of vehicle fluids or other potential contaminants. This plan will include (but not be limited to);

  - a map that delineates construction staging areas, where refueling, lubrication, and maintenance of equipment will occur;

  - a list of items required in a spill kit on-site that will be maintained throughout the life of the project;

  - procedures for the proper storage, use, and disposal of any solvents or other chemicals used in the restoration process;

  - and identification of lawfully permitted or authorized disposal destinations outside of the project site.

- CSP will designate and/or locate staging and stockpile areas within the existing maintenance yard area or existing roads and campsites to prevent leakage of oil, hydraulic fluids, etc. into native vegetation, sensitive wildlife areas, and waterways

- Prior to the start of on-site construction activities, construction personnel will clean and repair (other than emergency repairs) all equipment outside the project site boundaries.

- All heavy equipment parking, refueling, and service will be conducted within designated areas outside of the 100-year floodplain to avoid water course contamination.
- The project will comply with all applicable water quality standards as specified in the Central Valley Water Board Basin Plan.
- All construction activities will be suspended during heavy precipitation events (i.e., at least 1/2-inch of precipitation in a 24-hour period) or when heavy precipitation events are forecast.
- If construction activities extend into the rainy season (November through February) or if an un-seasonal storm is anticipated, CSP will properly winterize the site by covering (tarping) any stockpiled materials or soils and by constructing silt fences, straw bale barriers, fiber rolls, or other structures around stockpiles and graded areas.
- All heavy equipment will be required to include spark arrestors or turbo chargers (which eliminate sparks in exhaust) and have fire extinguishers on-site
- Construction crews will park vehicles 50 feet from flammable material, such as dry grass or brush. At the end of each workday, construction crews will park heavy equipment over a non-combustible surface to reduce the chance of fire.
- Prior to the start of incineration or prescription burning, CSP will develop a Fire Safety Plan for all personnel on the fire. The plan will include the emergency calling procedures for the USFS as the park falls within the USFS Responsibility Area, as well as the CAL FIRE and local fire department(s).
- CSP personnel will have a State Park radio at the Park, which allows direct contact with CAL FIRE and a centralized dispatch center, to facilitate the rapid dispatch of control crews and equipment in case of a fire.
- Under dry conditions, a filled water truck and/or fire engine crew will be onsite during activities with the potential to start a fire.

These SPRs are included here for informational purposes only. While they are not CEQA mitigation measures, they will also be incorporated into the project's Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP), so that all measures can be included in the same document for ease of compliance. CSP will be responsible for implementing these SPRs, in addition to the mitigation measures listed below.

FINDINGS

An IS has been prepared to assess the project's potential effects on the environment and the significance of those effects. Based on the IS, it has been determined that the project would not have any significant effects on the environment once mitigation measures are implemented. The conclusion is supported by the following findings:

1. The project would have no impact related to land use and planning, mineral resources, population and housing, public services, transportation and traffic, and tribal cultural resources.
2. The project would have a less-than-significant impact on aesthetics, agriculture and forestry resources, geology and soils, greenhouse gas emissions, hazards and hazardous materials, hydrology and water quality, noise, recreation, and utilities and service systems.
3. Mitigation is required to reduce potentially significant impacts related to air quality, biological resources, and cultural resources to less-than-significant levels.

Air Quality

Mitigation Measure AQ-1: Phase Project Activities

Project activities would be phased so that grading of the emergency access road would not occur concurrently with mechanical thinning activities involving the use of a shredder, skidder, or feller/buncher.

Implementation of Mitigation Measure AQ-1 would reduce project-generated nitrogen oxides (NO_x) emissions below the Shasta County Air Quality Management District's threshold of 25 pounds per day. Thus, project-generated emissions of criteria air pollutant (CAPs) and precursors would not violate or contribute substantially to an existing or projected air quality violation. This impact would be **less than significant with mitigation incorporated**.

Biological Resources

Mitigation Measure BIO-1: Pre-Construction Surveys

Pre-construction surveys will be conducted before ground-disturbing project activities. If pre-construction surveys for reestablishment of the emergency access road, or replacement of the upper Root Creek crossing find special-status plants, and it is not feasible to avoid removal of these plants, CSP shall consult with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, as appropriate depending on species status, to determine the appropriate mitigation measures for direct impacts that could occur because of project construction. CSP will implement standard BMPs and the agreed-upon mitigation measures to achieve no net loss of occupied habitat or individuals. Mitigation measures may include, but are not limited to, preserving and enhancing existing populations through seed collection or transplantation, and/or restoring or creating suitable habitat in sufficient quantities to achieve no net loss of occupied habitat and/or individuals. CSP shall also develop a mitigation and monitoring plan.

If relocation efforts are part of the mitigation plan, the plan shall include details on the methods used, including collection, storage, propagation, receptor site preparation, installation, long-term protection and management, monitoring and reporting requirements, success criteria, and remedial action responsibilities should the initial effort fail to meet long-term monitoring requirements. Success criteria shall include:

- Preserved populations will be self-producing. Populations will be considered self-producing when:
  - plants reestablish annually for a minimum of five years with no human intervention such as supplemental seeding; and
  - reestablished and preserved habitats contain an occupied area and flower density comparable to existing occupied habitat areas in similar habitat types near the project.

The implementation of Mitigation Measure BIO-1 would achieve no net loss of special-status plants and occupied habitat. Therefore, impacts from removal of special-status plants due to reestablishment of the emergency access road, replacement of the upper Root Creek crossing, or herbicide application would be reduced to less-than-significant levels. This impact would be **less than significant with mitigation incorporated**.

Cultural Resources

Mitigation Measure CU-1: Pre-Construction Surveys

A qualified Cultural Resources Specialist will conduct pre-construction surveys before any prescribed burns in areas where cultural resources are likely to be found (e.g., flat areas, near stream-beds). If any archaeological resources are found, a Cultural Resource Specialist will flag and/or fence all cultural resources with a buffer of 50 feet for avoidance during on-site project activities. The Cultural Resource Specialist will remove the fencing after project completion.

Implementation of Mitigation Measure CU-1 would reduce impacts to undiscovered archaeological resources in areas that were not previously surveyed and ensures that CSP Standard Project Requirements intended to protect cultural resources, such as flagging or fencing off sites, will be implemented. Therefore, this impact would be **less than significant with mitigation incorporated**.

Pursuant to Section 21082.1 of CEQA, CSP has independently reviewed and analyzed the IS and Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) for the project and finds that the IS and MND reflects the independent judgment of CSP. CSP further finds that the mitigation measures included in the IS shall be implemented as stated in the MND.

I hereby approve this project:

Matt Teague, Acting District Superintendent
California State Parks